

Really, It's OK to Pinch Mums



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People have been growing chrysanthemums for more than two thousand years. Mums make bright and colorful gardens. People in China and

other Asian cultures make tea with the flowers. Giacomo Puccini, the great Italian composer, even named one of his works after chrysanthemums, "Crisantemi."

(MUSIC: Manhattan String Quartet)

One basic kind of mum is the hardy or garden mum. The other basic kind is the florist mum. The garden mum is better able to handle different growing conditions.

There are many varieties of mums. The decorative mum is often seen in gardens. Another popular type, the quill mum, has long, straight petals like a tube or needle.

Chrysanthemum blooms can be white, yellow, gold, red or other colors. The plants often grow one meter high.

The soil for chrysanthemums should be kept moist but well drained so it does not get too wet.

Newly planted mums should be watered two or three times a week, depending on conditions. Plants established in the ground may do well just with normal rainfall.

Mums grow best in full sunshine. They produce colorful blooms when days get shorter and nights get longer. The life cycle of the plant depends on the amount of daylight. This is why experts advise against placing mums near nightlights or streetlights. The light may interfere with their normal growth cycle. The plants may develop buds too soon.

In climates where temperatures fall below freezing, plant mums at least six weeks before the first frost is expected. That way, the plants will be well established for cold weather.

Placing mulch around the plants can protect them from the cold. Consider using straw or shredded leaves for the mulch. The material will also add nutrients to the soil.

Some gardeners say the most beautiful presentation comes from planting mums close together. But be sure to leave enough space to let air flow between the plants. If not, there may be a greater chance of disease.

To get more blooms, gardeners pinch back the branches when new growth has reached fifteen centimeters. Squeeze about five to seven centimeters off each branch. Pinch it again when a branch grows another twelve to fifteen centimeters. Stop the pinching about one hundred days before you want the plants to bloom.

And that's the VOA Special English Agriculture Report. I'm Jim Tedder.